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LIBERIAN CENTENNIAL DINNER

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The gift of Mr. Harvey Firestone, Jr. and the Firestone Plantations Company opens a perspective of extraordinary interest and of great importance to the peoples of many lands. Contrary to conventional teaching, the history of the struggles for political and economic power throughout the centuries past is, in fact, the history of disease and its inroads upon civil and military populations. Disease has commonly decided the outcome of campaigns; it has determined political sovereignties; it has been a factor in the distribution of races; it has influenced the development of cultures; and it has tragically delayed the social and economic advancement of many areas of the world.

The diseases which have exerted these profound effects in history past and present fall within the category of tropical medicine. The more important of these conditions are epidemic typhus fever, malaria, plague, cholera, the dysenteries, smallpox, yellow fever, and African trypanosomiasis. Since most of these are uncommon or unknown in the United States, little attention has been directed to them in the curricula of our medical schools. In consequence the outbreak of war in 1941 found this nation ill-equipped to meet the needs of our armed forces who were committed to the maintenance of bases or the conduct of extensive campaigns throughout the entire tropical belt of the world. While the urgent needs of war have ceased, it is important to look ahead and to attempt to visualize the needs of the future. Both from the national and the international points of view strong and continued support for graduate education and research in tropical medicine are urgently needed in this country, especially since existing university funds

are too heavily burdened to support adequate developments in this newer educational field.

The future importance of tropical areas can hardly be exaggerated. They are the sources for essential raw materials for the economy of industrialized countries and markets for their manufactured goods. The need for rubber, tin, aluminum, copper, gold, iron, forest products such as mahogany and balsa wood, for coffee, tea, chocolate, copra and palm oil, bananas, and petroleum, to mention only a few important tropical products, indicate our dependence upon these regions of the world for many of the commonplace necessities of everyday life. In turn these regions now developing depend upon the industrialized nations of the temperate zone for the manufactured products essential for their own economy. The great improvements in transportation of the last decade have brought widely separated regions into closer contact, thus facilitating the exchange of goods and the contacts of individuals. Such exchanges, however, are faced with serious difficulties and handicaps, which are inherent in all tropical zones, whether the American tropics, Africa, or the Far East.

The most important and far-reaching of these handicaps is disease. Conditions of climate and soil as they affect agriculture and animal husbandry determine the nutritional level of a people and the prevalence of insects which carry tropical diseases. The cultural and religious beliefs of a people contribute fundamentally to the spread of many diseases and condition the willingness or unwillingness of the people to accept proven methods of prevention. Differ-

ences of language and lack of educational facilities contribute greatly to the profound inertia of local tradition. The summation of these factors, acting together as they do in so many of the tropical regions of the world, produce a characteristic vicious spiral. Restricted crops and heavily endemic diseases of domestic animals lead to widespread malnutrition. Uncontrolled human diseases lead to a high infant mortality rate and insufficient population. Further, they are the cause of high adult morbidity and consequent limited work potential. As a corollary, the population of such areas is necessarily existing at a low economic level and is incapable of developing their natural resources unaided. These same factors moreover, constitute serious handicaps to the effective operation of foreign capital endeavoring to develop such assets, and result finally in unduly high costs of production.

Thus a problem, relatively simple in the abstract, in its actual solution requires the application of many disciplines: therapeutic medicine, preventive medicine, agricultural botany, animal husbandry, sanitary engineering, social anthropology, religious philosophy, education and practical economics. Vast amounts of money have been spent in the course of the past generation to improve conditions in many such areas. In many instances the results have been disappointingly small and transient. This is due in no small part to failure to recognize the multiplicity of factors, or to inability to attack them on a sufficiently broad front. Notable exceptions have been the activities of certain corporations such as the Firestone Plantations Company and the United Fruit Company whose operations have led

to significant improvement in local health conditions, greatly improved economic conditions, and an appreciation on the part of the local populations of future progress which science may offer them.

Such assistance has proved to be an economically profitable investment. The demonstration of this fact is perhaps one of the most hopeful auguries of the future for many undeveloped regions which are incapable of breaking unaided the vicious circle of disease, undeveloped resources, poverty, and lack of educational opportunities. Expressed in different terms the health level of a community and its economic status are interdependent. The future of these tropical regions is therefore to a significant extent in the hands of business and industry operating in these areas and it is from such enlightened and experienced organizations that much of the support for such improvement must come. When efforts are properly planned and coordinated, when they are guided by a philosophy of responsibility to local populations and seek cooperation from responsible local leadership much of mutual benefit is accomplished.

The Liberian Institute of the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine, represents a partnership between the Government of the Republic of Liberia, American business and American science. It is a fitting memorial to a distinguished American, the late Mr. Harvey Firestone, who for many years had the welfare of the Liberian people greatly at heart. It is our hope and belief that the Institute will prove to be an important instrument in the development of effective methods of disease eradication and

control, and likewise a force in the development of greater international sympathy and understanding. The Institute is to be equipped to permit investigation of the numerous factors contributing to the medical and economic problems of the tropics. The scientific work undertaken will be under the direction of a group of our leading universities and medical schools through representative members of the respective faculties. There will be no restrictions or limitations based on race, nationality, creed or color. Two of the leading Negro medical schools of the United States are being invited to join the universities already affiliated with the Foundation and the Institute.

It is planned to establish the Institute as an international center for research into the medical and related problems of the tropics. The facilities will be made available to centers of education and research in other countries interested in this field of the medical sciences, especially institutions such as the London School of Tropical Medicine, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the Belgian School in Antwerp, the Pasteur Institutes in Africa, and the research units in the Belgian Congo. The centering of the many different points of view within the confines of one Institute and the informal international approach to problems of great fundamental importance should lead to more rapid progress and to an increasing spirit of international cooperation in the field of medicine.

The Institute and the Foundation are supported by contributions from American business. In return they offer to American business additional profits through reduction

of those production costs which are attributable to the medical problems of the tropics, and as local conditions are improved, the opportunity for the profitable development of local markets.

I have just this week returned from a hurried trip to Liberia where I have had the privilege of a series of discussions of this project with President Tubman and his cabinet. The President and his advisers recognized immediately the potential benefits which the Institute can bring to the People of Liberia. They also visualize the possibility that through the activities of the Institute and the facilities which the Government will provide, the Republic of Liberia may make important contributions to the solution of some of the pressing problems of populations resident in the tropics throughout the world. At the conclusion of the conferences the President handed me a formal letter in which he says in part: "... Your proposals are gratifying, and we look forward to the mutual benefits that we hope will be derived from the project envisaged by the Institute. You may be further assured that the project will have the full support and cooperation of the Liberian Government."

We are gathered here tonight to signalize the establishment of an institution unique in the field of the medical sciences. These are its objectives: to conduct a direct attack on a broad scale against the several segments of the vicious circle of endemic medical problems in the tropics; to aid in the development and improvement of local economies for the benefit of indigenous populations and for business both local and foreign; to provide stimulus and facilities

for educational institutions of the United States for research and teaching in this important field of medicine; and to utilize medicine as a tool in the development of better international understanding.

It is our hope and our profound conviction that achievement of these objectives will be accomplished and that in so doing we may contribute to human welfare and to the ultimate establishment of a closer and more sympathetic community of nations.

It is my responsibility and my privilege on behalf of the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine to express in the name of the officers and the Board of Directors our profound appreciation to the two partners in this endeavor: Mr. Harvey Firestone, Jr. whose generous gift will provide the physical plant of the Liberian Institute, and the Liberian people through their distinguished President who will provide the site and the facilities for the investigations which are to come. Such a partnership between Government, Business, and Science presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The Foundation recognizes the great responsibility which lies before it and the unique opportunity which acceptance of this responsibility implies. We shall not fail to bring every effort to bear to insure full fruition.



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